

Minnesota State Story



## 2004 Minnesota



***NRCS Mission. . .***

***To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.***

## Minnesota State Story



### Friends in Conservation:

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On behalf of the entire Minnesota NRCS staff and partners I proudly present this 2004 Minnesota NRCS State Story. Within the contents of this report, you will find the conservation results achieved for NRCS, conservation districts and other partners during Fiscal year 2004.

Minnesotans continue to make great strides in natural resources conservation planning and application throughout this great state. Much of this success has been due in part to the wonderful trust and cooperation that exists within the Minnesota conservation partnership.

Our locally led process continues to be powerfully effective in all 91 Minnesota Soil and Water Conservation Districts. This has opened the door to greater opportunity for more farmers than ever before to receive federal farm program benefits. The result has been more and better conservation applied to our Minnesota lands than ever before.

We had several important conservation events this past fiscal year. A few highlights included celebrating Earth Day with Chief Bruce Knight at the Glacial Ridge Project near Mentor, Minnesota and another Earth Day activity in St Paul, which involved local students from Harding high school. Additionally, Minnesota held two major National meetings during July 2004 -The Soil and Water Conservation Society along with the Asian Pacific Islander Organization. These conferences brought over 1,000 people from all over the country and internationally to learn more about conservation and natural resources in Minnesota.



#### NRCS Mission

*To provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment.*

#### NRCS Vision

*Harmony between People*

On August 26, 2004 Minnesota was honored to have the very first Conservation Security Program (CSP) contract signed in the country near Vernon Center, Minnesota at the James and Peggy Pahl farm. Our Minnesota NRCS employees and Partners worked tirelessly to make the results of the Blue Earth River CSP Watershed a positive outcome and a model for the nation. Thanks to all of you and your efforts we succeeded. Failure is never an option for the high performing conservation partnership team in Minnesota.

WILLIAM HUNT  
State Conservationist

## Protecting Our Natural Resources

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is a broad program which encompasses the majority of the work NRCS does. Work items such as the agency's infrastructure, accountability, training, technical references, field office technical guides, state-specific standards, engineering all are part of the CTA.

Virtually all of the conservation work that is accomplished in urban areas and outreach to underserved clientele is part of CTA. Additionally, conservation compliance activities such as highly erodible land determinations, wetland delineations and determinations, as well as program appeals are considered ongoing CTA work.

NRCS provides technical assistance to many landowners and operators who are growing non-commodity crops and who have unique resource concerns. For example, NRCS is working with



Hmong farmers in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region to help them develop conservation plans and implement practices which are suitable to their unique small farming operations.

The demand for CTA continues to grow in the State of Minnesota. CTA is the foundation for all of NRCS's conservation



activities. This is carried out in cooperation with our local 91 Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout Minnesota. This effort has created a seamless delivery of local, state and Federal conservation programs.



## 2004 Conservation Highlights Accomplishments

**Conservation System Plans Written,  
Cropland 582,928 acres  
Conservation System plans Written,  
Grazing Land 45,586 acres  
Forest Stand Improvement 14,939 acres  
Comprehensive Nutrient Management  
Plan's (CNMP's) Applied, Number 93  
CNMPs Applied, 23,327 acres**



## Farm Bill Conservation Programs Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

In 2004, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) added a total of 117 contracts with \$ 450,000 in Federal funding for a total of 2750 acres. Practices applied included:



- *Brush land Management*
- *Forest Stand Improvement*
- *Prescribed Burning*
- *Native Prairie Restoration*
- *Tree Planting*
- *Upland Wildlife Habitat Establishment*
- *Wetland Restoration*
- *Pond*
- *Shelterbelt Establishment*
- *Fencing – Livestock Exclusion*

### Wetlands Reserve Program

Minnesota received \$14 million in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding in Federal Fiscal Year 2004. Funds were obligated with 63 producers on 8052 acres and in 16 counties. Implementation of restoration progressed at a rapid pace in 2004 including: 2364 acres of wetlands restored and 3566 acres of associated uplands restored.

Once again applications were prioritized towards migratory wildlife species primarily in the western one-half of the State tied to the Prairie Pothole Region. The Glacial Ridge WRP Special Project continues to have acres restored and new applications funded. On Earth Day in April, *Chief Bruce Knight* visited this site east of Crookston. In his keynote speech, he highlighted a National key milestone of a net gain in agricultural wetlands.

A new geographic prioritization tool was proposed by the WRP Subcommittee of the State Technical Committee and was put into use by the USFWS's Habitat and Population Evaluation Team and the USGS Northern Prairie Wildlife Research Center. This GIS-based system utilizes data sets for waterfowl, song birds, critical habitat and at-risk species combined together in a scoring system that represents *up to 20%* of the total scoring points.

The Minnesota Habitat Corridor Partnership (HCP) recommended by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) and funded by the Minnesota Legislature had a number of successes this year including:

- 1. Forty-six easements on 5352 acres were funded in 2004 HCP Project Areas and corridors.*
- 2. Five full-time WRP contract employees were employed through Ducks Unlimited. They provide application, contract, engineering and restoration assistance throughout the State.*
- 3. Phase I of the HCP effort concluded in 2004, covering the first 2 years of the project. In total \$350,000 of State funding was spent to provide technical assistance to WRP in Phase I.*
- 4. We are now in Phase II of the HCP where \$ 465,100 will be spent on technical assistance.*

Jim Connaughton, Chair of President Bush's White House Council on Environmental Quality, visited the Straight River WRP project in Steele



County in July. He took this opportunity to sign a joint National Memorandum between Ducks Unlimited and NRCS in the accelerated implementation of WRP.

## **Farm Bill Conservation Programs**

### **Conservation Security Program**

Minnesota was selected to participate in the Nation's first signup for CSP in 2004. The Blue Earth Watershed in south central Minnesota and Northern Iowa was one of eighteen watersheds selected in the United States. The 2004 signup resulted in 137 contracts in the Minnesota portion of the Blue Earth River Watershed. *The following Minnesota counties had CSP contracts: Blue Earth, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, and Martin.*

The 2004 payments to participants totaled \$1,356,850 for the 137 contracts. The contracts covered 59,973 acres throughout the Blue Earth River Watershed.

### **Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)**

The goal of the GLCI is to increase public awareness regarding the importance of privately owned grazing lands. In 2004 NRCS geared up to better handle grazing management by hiring 3 additional grazing specialists. NRCS procured additional grazing assistance through a contribution agreement with the Mn. Dept. of Agriculture through the TSP provisions of the Farm Bill. Some GLCI accomplishments this year are:

- 530,506 feet of fencing applied**
- 8,198 acres of forage harvest management**
- 5,596 pasture and hayland plantings**
- 14,941 prescribed grazing acres**
- 513 prescribed burning acres**



*Pasture walks continue to be an effective way in which livestock producers can share what they have learned with others.*

## **Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program**

Minnesota obligated \$1,235,500 of Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) funds in Fiscal Year 2004. Two eli-



gible applications were received by NRCS in 2004. Dakota County was selected as the highest scored application and received 100% of these funds. FY-04 FRPP funds will be used in conjunction with the 2003 allocation of FRPP dollars to Dakota County to pay up to one-half of the costs of farmland protection easements. It is estimated that 500 acres of easements will be funded with the 2004 funds as well as 535 acres with the 2003 funds. These Federal resources will be combined with up to \$5 million of locally raised funds to assist with the implementation of the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Area Protection Plan.

### **Grasslands Reserve Program**

The Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) which first came to NRCS and the FSA in 2003 offers huge potential in the years to come for Minnesota farmers. During 2004 a total of 224 applications were received for GRP which totaled over \$6.5 million dollars in requests.

In 2004, a total of 27 farmers enrolled in the Program resulting in a total of \$905,000 dollars being invested for GRP and 3,573 acres enrolled into contracts.

## Farm Bill Conservation Programs

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Minnesota obligated almost \$24 million in general Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) financial assistance funds with 1725 producers. These funds were utilized in 85 of Minnesota's 87 counties. Ramsey and Lake Counties were the only counties that did not have any applicants .

In addition, Minnesota also obligated \$203,000 with seven producers in the EQIP Ground and Surface Water Conservation Program. This was the first year these funds were utilized in Minnesota. These funds were used to convert existing center pivot irrigation systems from high pressure to low pressure systems, saving water and energy resources and reducing potential groundwater contamination.

Once again, allocations were made to the Local Work Groups and the Area Work Groups where local and area resource concerns were prioritized for funding. This has become a very positive planning and implementation process for Minnesota agriculture resulting in wall-to-wall conservation opportunities.



### Highlights of 2004 EQIP

*Approximately 60 % of the funds were obligated to livestock concerns. Wastewater and feedlot runoff control systems, animal mortality facilities, nutrient management with and without manure, prescribed grazing as well as fencing, pipelines and watering facilities were funded.*

Many Erosion Control Practices such as residue management, terraces, dams, diversions and strip cropping were funded.

*\$413,000 was obligated in five contracts with individual American Indian producers and tribes. These included contracts with the following tribes: Mille Lacs, Red Lake, White Earth and Upper Sioux .*

*29 producers were certified as Limited Resource Producers. These producers, due to limited resources, received up to 90% cost-sharing to implement cost-share practices.*

Millions of dollars were paid to producers to implement incentive and other practices in previously funded EQIP contracts. These included contracts from 1997 up to and including 2004.

Additional information about EQIP can be obtained from the Minnesota website:

<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov>





## Farm Bill Conservation Programs

### Conservation Programs

#### Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) is administered by the Farm Service Agency. Field work, seeding recommendations,



planning and monitoring for these multi year contracts are performed by NRCS, SWCD and Technical Service Providers as part of an ongoing conservation program workload in Minnesota.

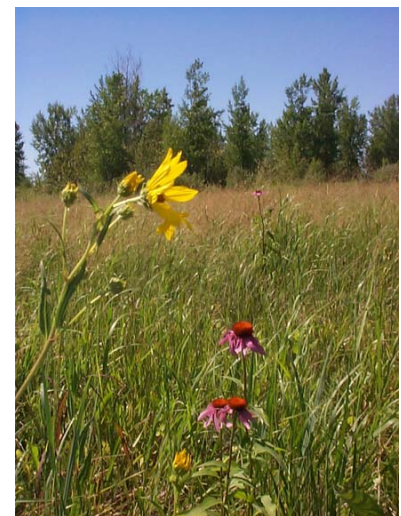
#### 2004 CRP Forestry/Agro Forestry Planned Practices Utilizing Department of Natural Resources Forestry Assistance

Acres Planned	2000.7 acres
Firebreak	9,906 feet
Forest Site Preparation	23 acres
Forest Stand Improvement	64 acres
Prescribed Burning	620 acres
Riparian Forest Buffer	3,308 acres
Tree/Shrub Establishment	6,045 acres
Use Exclusion	68,058 acres
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	2,045,135 feet
Forestland Reestablished or Improved	6,109 acres



#### 2004 CRP Forestry/Agro forestry (continued) Applied Practices (NRCS)

Firebreak	12,965 feet
Forest Site Prep	15 acres
Forest Stand Improvement	48 acres
Prescribed Burning	333 acres
Riparian Forest Buffer	2,719 acres
Tree/Shrub Establishment	5,234 acres
Use Exclusion	52,167 acres
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	1,485,003 feet
Forest Reestablished or Improved	5,282 acres



## Water Resources

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566) provides funding for small watershed of 250,000 acres or less. This program works through local government sponsors, including local SWCD's, to address issues related to natural resource concerns as well as economic impacts in specific watersheds.



In 2004, an important addition to the Canby project at Del Clark Lake was completed. This project provided handicap accessible fishing area. Minnesota DNR, NRCS and the Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District worked together in a partnership to successfully complete this important project.

## Resource Conservation and Development

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) helps communities improve their economic, social, and environmental conditions throughout the state of Minnesota. By using locally led, grassroots efforts, residents identify problems and establish goals and objectives, develop alternatives, and implement solutions.

NRCS has eight approved RC&D Areas covering 64 counties in Minnesota. A ninth applicant area, Coteau des Prairies RC&D, is seeking USDA Authorization as an official RC&D Area. Additionally, four counties in east-central Minnesota have banded together to begin formulating another applicant area, the Mid-Minnesota-Mississippi RC&D.

People in the RC&D communities are the folks who make the choices for their communities-whether they work on land conservation, water management, environmental enhancement, or something unique to their particular area. In every case, local people are the decision-makers and these are the folks who make things happen in their local RC&D area.



*July 13, 2004 marked the 40th Anniversary of the Wes Min RC&D Council. An anniversary celebration was held in Wadena, Minnesota. John Rife, founding Board member was on hand to re-dedicate the Crow Wing River Canoe Trail. This trail was one of the first approved RC&D project measures in the Nation.*



## Leading the Way in Conservation Technology

*Good science and practical technology are the heart of good land management and sound conservation technology. Key resource technologies available from the NRCS in Minnesota include:*

### Soil Survey and Digitizing

Soil surveys provide a field-based scientific inventory of soil resources, including soil maps, data about physical and chemical properties of soils and information on the potentials and limitations of each soil. The NRCS is the lead Federal agency responsible for soil mapping on private lands.

Soil surveys have many uses, however they are intended for people to use in making sure land is used within its capabilities and treated in accordance with its need. Soils data can be used to determine highly erodible areas, potential wetlands, sites where livestock manure and other nutrients can be applied with little environmental impact, prime farmland, or other soil interpretations critical to natural resource management. Soils data is also useful to urban planners and other government agencies. This year, Minnesota soil scientists mapped almost *one million acres*.

The digitizing of soil maps and the development of the soil survey geographic database are an integral part of the soil survey process today. They are completed concurrently with other activities in both initial and maintenance soil survey projects. A soil survey geographic database is one of the products of a completed soil survey. The soil survey geographic database is maintained in the local field office and archived at the NRCS National Cartography and Geospatial Center in Fort Worth, Texas

Minnesota has *44 counties in Minnesota that meet SSURGO standards*. NRCS is working with others to utilize new technologies

### Technical Service Providers

Technical Service Providers (TSPs) are individuals certified to provide technical assistance on behalf of USDA. In 2004, \$1.7 million funds were allocated to and spent on TSP for Conservation Technical Assistance, WRP and EQIP.

Ducks Unlimited spent 100% of the FY-03 funded Contribution Agreement, \$100,000, providing technical assistance on WRP.

#### **In FY-2004 the following TSP's were initiated within the WRP program:**

1. \$205,000 with a Ducks Unlimited Contribution Agreement.
2. \$65,000 with the Minnesota Waterfowl Association and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to provide technical assistance in the central part of the State.
3. \$20,000 Contribution Agreements with the Becker Soil and Water Conservation District and to the Joint Powers Board located in Detroit Lakes to provide engineering assistance on WRP projects in the west-central part of the State.
4. \$130,000 Indefinite delivery, Indefinite quantity contracts to four private engineering firms for engineering services for WRP restorations.

#### **In FY-2004 the following TSP's were initiated within the EQIP program.**

\$1,232,080 was obligated with technically qualified TSPs to accelerate the implementation of EQIP. A few highlights are:

\$379,000 with individual Soil and Water Conservation Districts through Contribution Agreements

\$228,000 in individual producer contracts for them to hire TSP's to implement Nutrient Management, Pest Management, Prescribed Burning and other planned practices.

\$231,000 in individual producer contracts for them to hire TSP's to plan, design and check out Wastewater and Feedlot runoff Control Systems.

\$384,000 with private consultants to plan, design and check out Livestock Watering systems and Erosion Control Structures.

## Our People

### NRCS at work in Minnesota

NRCS employees are highly skilled in many technical and scientific areas. Our Minnesota NRCS employees offer on-site technical assistance and they understand local conditions. NRCS's primary mission is to help private landowners plan and use good conservation practices on their land. NRCS has an office in nearly every Minnesota county. Assistance is available in a nearby USDA Ag Service Center location for those desiring some natural resource assistance in disciplines such as:

- o Soil Science
- o Soil Conservation
- o Agronomy
- o Biology
- o Forestry
- o Engineering
- o Cartography
- o Geology
- o Geographic Information Systems
- o Hydrology
- o Wetland Science
- o Water Quality
- o Economics
- o Cultural Resources
- o Resource Conservation and Development

*During the summer of 2004 NRCS students participated in a week-long student orientation.*

*Below is a photo of some of the students who attended the training session at the Otte farm in Dakota County, Minnesota.*



**NRCS is an equal opportunity provider and employer**

## The Earth Team

The Earth Team volunteers in Minnesota continue to help our priority conservation efforts. In 2004, volunteers contributed over 81,000 hours in NRCS Programs at Minnesota NRCS offices. The Earth Team program is the voluntary arm of NRCS and continues to be a vital part of the quality service that is delivered to farmers and land users in Minnesota. A special thank you to all who have helped in many ways to make the volunteer program a success in Minnesota.

On April 22nd, Earth Day 2004 was celebrated at Hidden Falls Park in St. Paul. NRCS partnered together with the City of St.



Paul, St. Paul Parks, and Harding high school. Students worked hand in hand with NRCS employees to remove invasive species and trash. A highlight for the Earth Day participants was mounting wood duck houses which were made by the Harding high school woodshop class.

Earth Team volunteers were utilized at the International SWCS Annual Meeting in Saint Paul. Soil and water Conservation District Supervisors and RC&D Council persons from throughout Minnesota volunteered at the international conference. Rick and Suzanne Hansen, Dakota SWCD Supervisors served as Earth Team volunteers

